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INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001352

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TAGS: PREL MOPS IZ TU
SUBJECT: SULEYMANIYAH INCIDENT HITS RAW NERVE; TURKISH
FORCES PLACED ON ALERT

Classified By: DCM Nancy McEldowney for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The encounter between Turkish Special Forces and Peshmerga security units in Suleymaniyah on June 1 sparked a reaction throughout the Turkish government. The Turkish General Staff issued a public statement about the encounter which included a warning that another such incident would be met with a response. The Turkish Army, Air Force, and Special Forces were placed on alert and kept in that status until mid-morning June 2. Given pre-existing tensions (over PKK terrorism, handover of KRG security, and the domestic political crisis), we recommend outreach to KRG President Barzani with a request that he take visible steps both to prevent further encounters and to indicate a desire to help stem PKK terrorism from KRG territory. Such steps are essential now to calm the situation and minimize the likelihood for an unhelpful Turkish response. End Summary.

¶2. (C) As discussed in e-mail traffic, on June 1 in the Iraqi city of Suleymaniyah there was an encounter between Turkish Special Forces stationed there and Peshmerga security units. Evidently, the Turks were wearing civilian clothes and had entered the city to go shopping. They were stopped at a traffic control point by armed Peshmerga forces. Following a tense exchange, the Turks clarified their identity, and the incident was resolved without weapons being fired. Later that same day, we understand a PUK representative visited the Turkish base and attempted to clarify the misunderstanding.

¶3. (C) FM Gul's senior advisor contacted Ambassador late on June 1 to express concern about the incident and to urge that immediate steps be taken both to prevent further encounters and to head off a media controversy.

¶4. (C) A senior member of the TGS told us on June 2 that this incident was viewed with great seriousness. He stated that any further incident involving harm to Turkish forces in Iraq would be met with force. He clarified that a Special Operations plan to deal with such a contingency had already been developed and that the military had standing orders to execute whenever necessary (presumably to protect Turkish forces and/or retaliate). Explicitly distinguishing this from a cross border operation targeting PKK terrorists, the TGS General warned that Turkey would immediately go after KRG targets if its troops were harmed.

¶5. (C) Comment: The Turks have exaggerated and/or distorted the facts of the encounter. There will be further distortion as the Turkish media lathers up into hysteria. As we work to calm the waters here, we recommend that Ambassador Crocker reach out to KRG President Barzani to impress upon him that -- distortions notwithstanding -- the Turks are on a hair

trigger. Incidents with the Peshmerga and/or another PKK attack involving significant casualties will likely engender a Turkish military response - an outcome that will undermine Turkish, Iraqi, and USG interests. End Comment.

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